



Workforce First Program for People Experiencing Homelessness

SD23: Economic Opportunity & Affordability, Health & Environment

Workforce First Program

Last year, Austin Public Health (APH) collaborated with Austin Parks and Recreation Department (PARD), Watershed Protection Department (WPD), and local non-profits [Family Eldercare](#) and [The Other Ones Foundation](#) (TOOF), on a program called [Workforce First](#), to provide part-time work to individuals experiencing homelessness. The program focuses on connecting homeless neighbors with gainful employment, assisting with their reintegration into the workforce, and providing support service resources to contribute to exiting homelessness. Their current operation includes a rotating 7-person crew that performs primarily encampment cleanups and vegetative management south of Lady Bird Lake under the supervision of TOOF and Parks and Recreation staff.

The Other Ones Foundation offers an innovative wholistic approach in that the employment opportunities are combined with highly individualized case management, and assistance with obtaining vital records and filling out housing applications. In offering more than just the basics of transportation to and from the worksites and the day's payment, TOOF also fills a crucial role as a social network where folks are welcome to clean up after the day's work and spend down time together sharing stories as part of a supportive community.

Table 1. FY19 Current Year Funding

Department	FY19 Funding
Parks and Recreation	\$58,000
Public Health	\$158,000
Watershed Protection	\$25,179
Total	\$241,179

Source: Austin Public Health

Along with Parks & Recreation, the Workforce First crew performs similar clean-up work for two other city departments – Animal Services and Watershed Protection. All three departments are supportive of the Workforce First program, with additional financial backing provided by PARD and WPD to fill funding gaps in FY19. This coming year, TOOF crew members can be trained to fill part-time or full-time entry-level positions at Animal Services which experiences a high turnover rate for those positions.

The Workforce First program is a successful program and is designed as a “win-win” prospect: people experiencing homelessness have regular employment, job training, access to support services, and assistance with finding housing. The city receives much-needed help with encampment cleanup in our parks and open spaces, plus assistance in our animal shelter.

Ongoing funding request for three additional Workforce First crews

Three additional Workforce First crews will help address areas where the city has great need, such as encampment abatement, vegetation management, repainting public restrooms, monitoring graffiti breakouts, other environmental mitigation jobs, and assisting at the animal shelter.

An ongoing investment in the FY20 budget of **\$849,866** supplies remaining resources for the original crew, plus three additional crews with salaries for the workers, supervisory staff, social services (such as job training and housing readiness), and equipment (**Table 2**), bringing the total crew number to four.

Two of the crews would be devoted to Parks & Recreation, one crew for Watershed Protection, and the final crew for Animal Services. Notably, the fourth crew would be reserved for women experiencing homelessness who are also survivors of domestic abuse. As mentioned above, this Animal Services crew would be trained to fill permanent entry-level positions in the department.

As the program requires existing staff at PARD to perform supervisory functions while also fulfilling their existing job duties, **Table 2** includes a **\$95,000** request for an “Environmental Program Coordinator” to oversee the Workforce First Program within PARD. This position could potentially oversee future homelessness strategies implemented within the department.

Table 2. FY20 Workforce First Program Funding

Crew	Employment Specialists	Participant Pay	General Operating Expenses	10% Administrative Fee	Grand Total
1	\$123,200	\$156,000	\$48,060	\$32,726	\$359,986
2	\$41,800	\$136,500	\$7,800	\$18,610	\$204,710
3	\$41,800	\$136,500	\$9,800	\$18,810	\$206,910
4	\$41,800	\$97,500	\$9,800	\$14,910	\$164,010
TOOF Supervisor					\$24,250
Parks Supervisor					\$95,000
Total					\$1,054,866
FY20 Total in APH Budget					(-\$205,000)
Final Total	\$248,600	\$526,500	\$75,460	\$85,056	\$849,866

Source: The Other Ones Foundation & Parks & Recreation Dept.

Workforce First: Investing in our homeless population and addressing city needs

- In 2018, over 7,000 people accessed homeless services in the city – many more than the “point in time” count held annually; parks staff who regularly work with the homeless population report that the number of homeless individuals has doubled over the past few years in the city’s open space areas.
- Since March 2019, the Workforce First crew collected over 90,000 pounds of trash out of green spaces in South Austin.
- The program has positively affected 121 people experiencing homelessness through participation in the regular crew and collateral opportunities around the program’s outreach. The positive benefits include full-time and part-time employment, highly individualized case management, and navigating housing resources; so far this year, 20 individuals have been moved into permanent housing and 6 have been hired into The Other Ones Foundation as full-time employees.
- The Other Ones Foundation was recently recognized on KLRU’s [*Decibel: Homeless in Austin*](#) for their innovative efforts assisting people experiencing homelessness.
- The Other Ones Foundation was invited by the [Texas Recreation and Parks Society](#) to their annual conference to present their program demonstrating “how a partnership between parks and human services can offer dignified employment, turning a homeless ‘problem’ into a solution that serves communities.”